

Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

5 Classroom Tips

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- 1. Teach procedures, rather than rely on rules.** Rules are necessary in games. Between people, however, **rules result in adversarial relationships** because rules require enforcement. In addition, rules are often stated in negative terms and imply an imposed consequence. **Rules place the teacher in the position of the enforcer, a cop**--rather than that of a teacher, mentor, or facilitator of learning. Enforcing rules often results in power struggles that rarely result in win-win situations or in good relationships. Instead, they often result in reluctance, resistance, and resentment. Upon analysis, you will see that rules are either procedures or expectations. Rather than relying on rules, therefore, you will be much more effective if you **teach procedures**, which is **the essence of good classroom management**. Rules are "left-hemisphere" oriented. They work with people who are orderly and structured. "Right-hemisphere" dominant students act randomly and spontaneously. Teaching procedures, rather than relying on rules, is significantly more effective with this type of student.
- 2. Communicate in positive terms.** The brain thinks in pictures, not in words. We often want to assist people by telling them what to avoid. So often, however **when you tell a person what not to do, the opposite results**. The reason is that the brain does not envision "don't" or any other negative-type word. The brain envisions pictures, illusions, visions, and images. Here is an example: Don't think of the color blue. What color did you envision? *The teacher who tells the student not to look at his neighbor's paper is having the student's brain envision looking at his neighbor's paper.* When people tell others what *not* to do, the "don't" is what the brain images. **Always communicate in positive terms of what you do want.** Examples: "Keep your eyes on your own

paper." Instead of "Don't run," say "We walk in the hallways at our school."

3. Rather than aiming at obedience, promote responsibility.

Obedience does not create desire. A more effective approach is to **promote responsibility; obedience then follows as a natural by-product.** Focusing on obedience prompts using coercion, which is the least effective approach for changing behavior. Although teachers can control students temporarily, teachers cannot change students. People change themselves, and the most effective approach for actuating students to change is to eliminate coercion, which is not to be confused with permissiveness or not using authority. The approach for the teacher is to hone the **skill of asking reflective questions.** *As long as the teacher does the asking, rather than the telling, the teacher controls the conversation.* Use questions such as, "Are you willing to try something different if it would help you?" and "What would an extraordinary person do in this situation?"

4. Encourage reflection. This step is critical and is very often overlooked. Students cannot be exposed to something once and then expect the learning to go into long-term memory. **Having students share and reflect reinforces the learning.**

5. Rather than impose, elicit. When a consequence is imposed, students are deprived of ownership in the decision. A more effective and fairer approach is to **elicit a consequence or a procedure to redirect impulses** that will help each student become more responsible. This can easily be accomplished and still be consistent in terms of fairness by asking students if they would rather be treated as a group or as individuals. They will readily have a preference to be treated as individuals and have ownership in the decision that will help them. Use questions such as, "**What procedure can we develop so that in the future you will not be a victim of your impulses?**"

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